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DEPT FOR AF/E
LONDON AND PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/14/2018
TAGS: PREL PTER SO ER
SUBJECT: ARS HARD-LINER ADMITS DISSENT IN RANKS

Classified By: CDA Melinda Tabler-Stone for reason 1.4(d).

¶1. (C) PolOff met on August 12 with Mahad Yusuf, Inspector General and Central Committee member of the hard-line branch of the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia (ARS). Yusuf explained that the hard-liners have now consolidated their beliefs into two quarreling ideologies: patriotic and Islamic. He asserted that Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys is associated with the patriotic faction and seeks to work with Western governments. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Before the split among the ARS ranks, Mahad Yusuf originally served in the ARS as a Central Committee member and as an assistant to Sharif Hassan Sheikh Adan (former Speaker of the Transitional Federal Parliament). The hard-line members in Asmara promoted Mahad to the level of Inspector General following the election of Sheikh Aweys as their new Chairman.

PATRIOTIC VS. ISLAMIC

¶3. (C) According to Yusuf, the hard-line ARS membership, which initially included representatives from the Council of Islamic Courts, diaspora, civil society, and former Members of Parliament, has reconciled its ideologies into those who wish to end the violence as quickly as possible (patriotic) and those who wish to establish Somalia as an Islamic nation under shariah law. For the patriotic branch, Mahad explained, peace entails the swift removal of Ethiopian forces from "sovereign Somali territory" and the disbanding of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG). Yusuf admitted that the patriotic and the Islamic factions are constantly at odds over which direction to take the organization. Yusuf's comments mirror those of an Egyptian diplomat, who told PolOff he witnessed ARS members arguing for several hours during one of their July meeting sessions. When asked as to which category Sheikh Aweys fell under, Yusuf stated that Aweys is patriotic and only wishes to end the violence.

¶4. (C) Yusuf also emphasized that the ARS is at a point where it recognizes it cannot move forward without assistance from the West. Speculating that the West will not accept an Islamic Somalia and that Somalia will not accept TFG leadership, Yusuf explains, the hard-line branch is eagerly seeking a "third solution," which would ideally involve cooperation with Western nations.

RELATIONSHIP TO "FORMER" ARS MEMBERS

15. (C) Yusuf stated that there could be reconciliation between the ARS hard-liners and the followers of Sheikh Sharif ("expelled" by the ARS hard-liners at the conclusion of a weeks-long conference in Asmara). Yusuf boasted of ARS members in Djibouti allegedly calling the hard-liners, seeking a chance to return to Asmara and escape the "inefficiency" of Sheikh Sharif.

16. (C) COMMENT: Yusuf, a Canadian citizen, has traditionally shown himself to be a hard-liner opposed to reconciliation efforts with the TFG. He has simultaneously, and somewhat ironically, shown a consistent desire for the ARS to collaborate with the United States and other Western nations. Despite his statements encouraging Western input into ARS hard-liner affairs, Yusuf's underlying rhetoric is that no discussions, negotiations, or compromises will be made with the TFG or with Ethiopia. End Comment.

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